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ABSTRACT

The Regional Educational Laboratories comprise a national network of institutions with similar missions, goals, and strategies. Since their establishment in 1965, the Regional Educational Laboratories have undertaken long-range initiatives to solve difficult problems in U.S. schools. This annual report describes some of the efforts of the Regional Educational Laboratories as they work to carry out a rigorous program of educational research. A profile of each of the 10 laboratories highlights activities for research and educational improvement. Each of the laboratories provides national leadership in a specialty area. The laboratories and their special areas are: (1) AEL (formerly Appalachia Education Laboratory); rural education; (2) Laboratory for Student Success (LSS): urban education; (3) Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL): curriculum, learning, and instruction; (4) North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL): educational technology; (5) Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (LAB): language and cultural diversity; (6) Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL): school change processes; (7) Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL): language and cultural diversity; (8) The Regional Educational Laboratory at SERVE: early childhood education; (9) Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: language and cultural diversity; and (10) WestEd: assessment. (SLD)

REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORIES

1999 ANNUAL REPORT

Linking the Worlds of Research, Policy, and Practice

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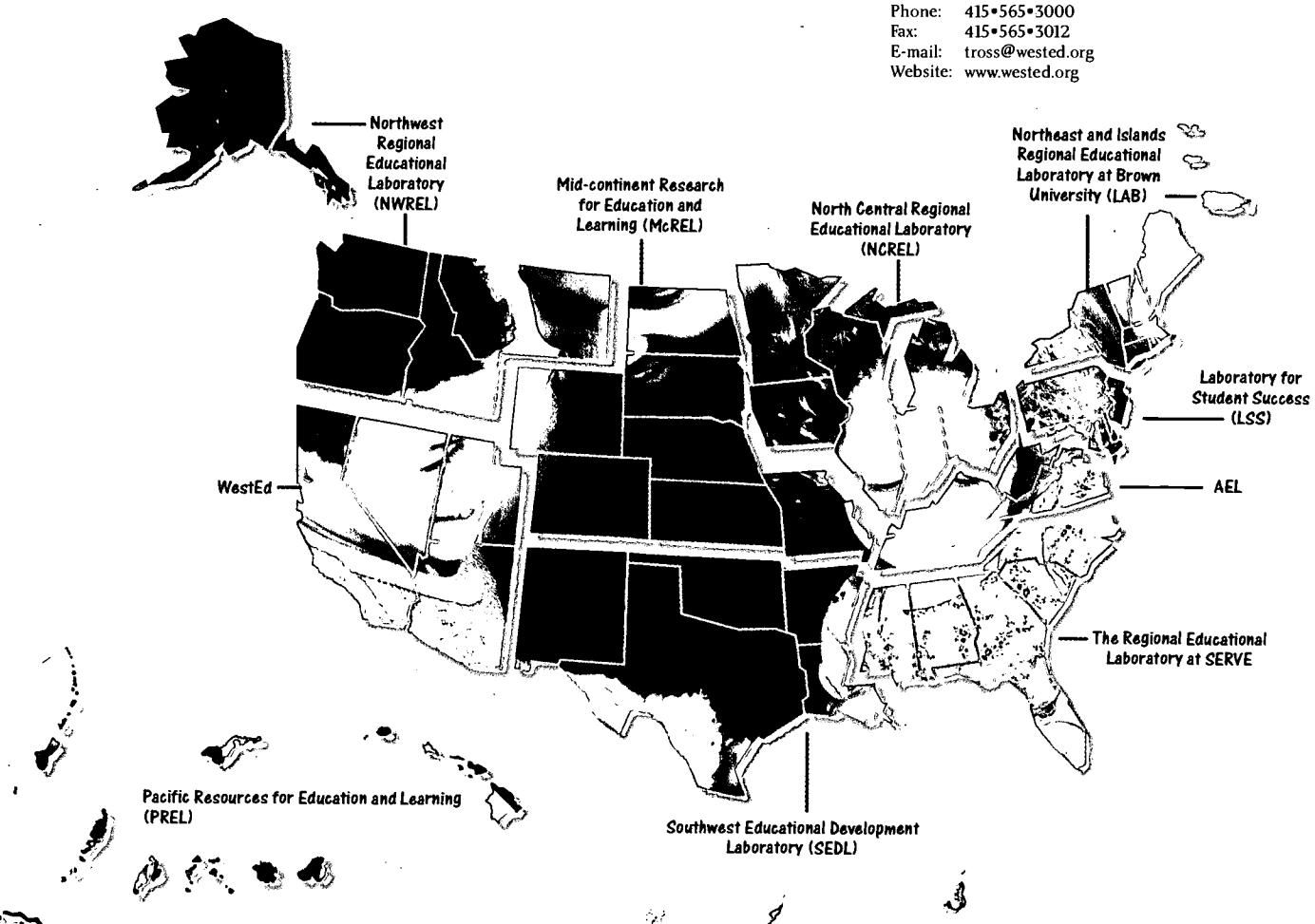

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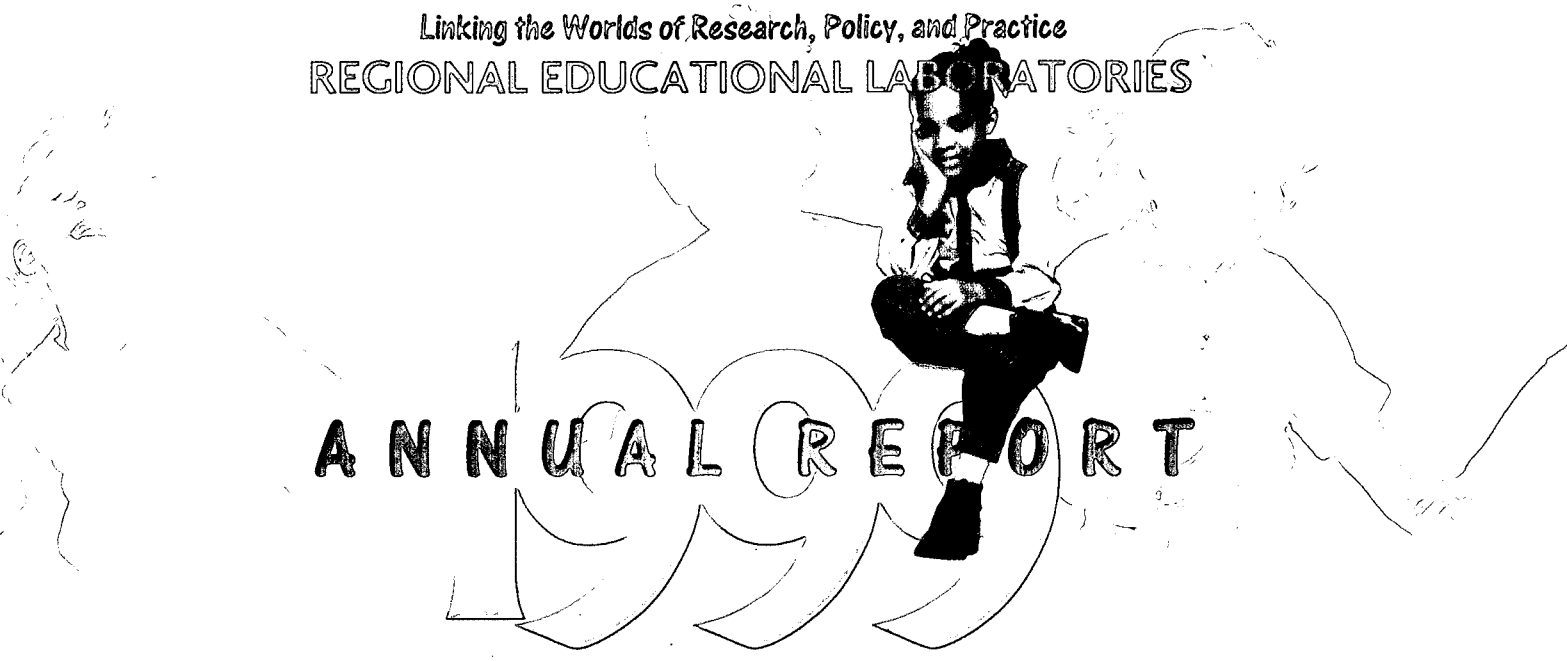
Linking the Worlds of Research, Policy, and Practice

REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORIES



ANNUAL REPORT 1999

Regional Educational Laboratory Network Collaboration

With more than 30 years of experience in working to improve the nation's schools, the Regional Educational Laboratories have established a track record of collaborative research and offer a well-developed system for addressing the education needs of schools, school districts, and state departments of education. Collaborating on specific initiatives of national importance has resulted in durable, ongoing relationships in which resources and authority are shared in a coordinated effort. These collaborative initiatives require joint planning, implementation, and evaluation. The Labs have worked together to achieve shared goals and practical solutions that are superior to the results each organization is capable of achieving on its own.

The national Laboratory system, through its joint efforts, has the unique ability to implement research initiatives and synthesize research into useful tools for educators, parents, and policymakers. The products and services developed by Labs have helped schools, districts, and state education agencies to take advantage of the latest and best research and proven practices in school improvement. Labs also have enabled practitioners and policymakers to become better consumers of education research by assisting them in evaluating the quality of research and applying research findings to efforts to address current needs.

An example of this collaborative work is the REL Network website—a combined website launched in April 1999 that links the ten Labs and provides quick access to education research and development. Another example of Lab collaboration is the Labs' working together to establish a national system of Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) resources to assist states, districts, and schools in addressing issues associated with the implementation of models of comprehensive reform. For example, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory established a national database of CSR grantee schools.

The RELs continue to collaborate on broad initiatives of national importance, enabling them to leverage their shared work to create value-added products and services for educators, parents, and policymakers.

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The Role of Regional Educational Laboratories in Research

The Regional Educational Laboratories (Labs) have a long tradition of conducting high-quality, useful, cutting-edge research and developing processes and products to make new knowledge available to their constituents. The Labs' knowledge of their regions, their understanding of the informational needs of policymakers and educators, and their involvement in the field enable them to link the worlds of research, policy, and practice.

The Regional Educational Laboratories comprise a national network of institutions with similar missions, goals, and strategies. Research-based knowledge on education issues has been developed and is available from the Labs. The Laboratory Network Program provides the Labs an opportunity to work together to build knowledge and share effective practices.

Since their establishment in 1965, Regional Educational Laboratories have undertaken long-term research initiatives to solve difficult and pressing problems in the nation's schools. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's (NWREL) "Onward to Excellence" program, the Laboratory for Student Success's (LSS) "Community for Learning" program, and AEL's QUILT program are examples of research initiatives based on

years of development and testing, and these programs have empirical evidence to validate their effectiveness. Many schools throughout the nation have adopted these programs as part of their reform efforts.

Labs enable educators and policymakers to quickly and easily obtain research-based information. For example, WestEd's U.S. Charter Schools' website provides research on effective practices, and it is viewed as a credible, objective resource on charter schools. The Laboratory at Brown University developed and maintains the "Knowledge Loom," a growing collection of research-based best practice resources. The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning's (McREL) national database of content standards and benchmarks assists states and local communities in responding to demands for high standards aligned with curriculum and assessment.

Regional boards, the key governing structures of the Labs, ensure that each Lab's research and development agenda is driven by regional needs and priorities. The RELs' strong connections with their regions help them address one of the greatest areas of concern noted by the National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board (NERPPB) in 1999: practitioners appear to be "less-than-enthusiastic consumers" of research. Because educators reportedly deem research in many cases to be irrelevant, difficult to apply, or unrelated to their professional growth, the NERPPB (which also governs OERI—the Office of Educational Research and Improvement) has called for linkages that result in "continuing identification of application problems and unmet needs from practitioner and applied research communities."

The Labs identify national and regional education issues and provide research that informs policy and practice. Because of their strong ties to their regions and to national networks, the Labs serve as the link within general, procedural, and contextual knowledge and between research and practice. For example, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning's (PREL) annual Pacific Education Conference and the Regional Educational Laboratory at SERVE's annual Regional Forum on School Improvement make research accessible to practitioners and policymakers. These conferences enable educators to learn about current research, to network, and to improve educational practice.

Labs are directly involved in relevant educational issues. The commitment of all ten Labs to address educational challenges faced in urban communities illustrates the active and close relationships they have established with educators in their regions. In Chicago, for example, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) has worked with 11 schools on probation because fewer than 20 percent of their students were scoring at national norms. Using the NCREL-developed Strategic Teaching and Reading Project and Everyday Mathematics (developed by the University of Chicago), NCREL's staff provided assistance that resulted in eight of these schools improving beyond the probationary status in less than two years.

Labs have successfully implemented the recommendation to create a "system of support for projects in which professional researchers and educators share in the accountability for achieving success in improving educational practices and outcomes" described in *Investing in Learning: A Policy Statement with Recommendations on Research in Education* by the National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board (1999). For 35 years, Labs have involved practitioners in the research and development process. Most Lab initiatives take place at school sites, and much of the dissemination occurs through long-term professional development. In many cases, educators participate in Lab-sponsored networks to increase their understanding of new programs and initiatives and to contribute to the growth of research and development efforts. For example, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's (SEDL) Technology Assistance Program provided professional development to six sites in the region to combine technology with project-based activities. SEDL staff modeled techniques for teachers and then assisted them in evaluating classroom activities to ensure that curricular goals were met.

A constant challenge in research is the application of findings. Traditionally, research, development, and dissemination have been discrete activities. However, the Regional Educational Laboratories understand that when sharp divisions between these activities exist, practitioners generally devote little time to research—that is, analyzing how their programs work or how they may be replicated in other settings.

Practitioners in Lab initiatives are considered research partners from the outset and are thereby vested in applying results to increasing student achievement. The Labs' experience and expertise in research provides strong support for educational systems that base policy, curricular, instructional, and assessment decisions on current research and data.

School reform efforts are focused on school improvement. Educators across the nation realize that while hard work and commitment to children are key factors in improving education, meeting current challenges requires the implementation of policies and programs derived from careful research, testing, and development. Never before has educational research played such an important role in the nation's schools. As a 1997 OERI and NERPPB report states:

> *One thing is clear: if the nation's schools and colleges are to meet these challenges, we cannot afford hit-or-miss approaches driven by fads and fallacies. We need solid scientific evidence about what works, for whom, and under what conditions.*

In the 1994 "Educational Research, Development, Dissemination, and Improvement Act," Congress set forth a powerful challenge for education research:

> *The Congress declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide to every individual an equal opportunity to receive an education of high quality.... To achieve (that) goal... requires the continued pursuit of knowledge about education through research, development, improvement activities, data collection, synthesis, technical assistance, and information dissemination.*

As a result of its studies, and its meetings with teachers, educators, researchers, policymakers, and others, the National Educational Research Policies and Priorities Board has reached consensus on four goals that are critical to meet the challenges expressed by Congress. These goals are statements about characteristics of research in education. If the goals are reached, there will be a sound basis for trust in the results:

- Priorities are set, and activities are problem-centered.
- High standards of quality are created and upheld.
- Work is collaborative and rigorous.
- Mission is congruent with resources.

The Regional Educational Laboratories are well positioned to carry out a conscientious and rigorous program of education research, development, and dissemination. They demonstrate a wealth of experience in addressing specific problems and developing and testing principles of education that can be applied to sound policy and practice.

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National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board. (June 1999). *Investing in Learning: A Policy Statement with Recommendations on Research in Education.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. <www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/NERPPB/>

Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board. (1997). *Building Knowledge for a Nation of Learners: A Framework for Education Research.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. <www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/NERPPB/>

Regional Educational Laboratories 1998 Annual Report. (1999). *Improving America's Schools through Educational R & D.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Building on the Past... Preparing Schools for a New Future

As society changes, so must schools if they are to teach the skills that students need to succeed in a rapidly changing world. The traditional industrial model of teaching and learning is in need of revamping as fast-paced technological advancement accelerates.

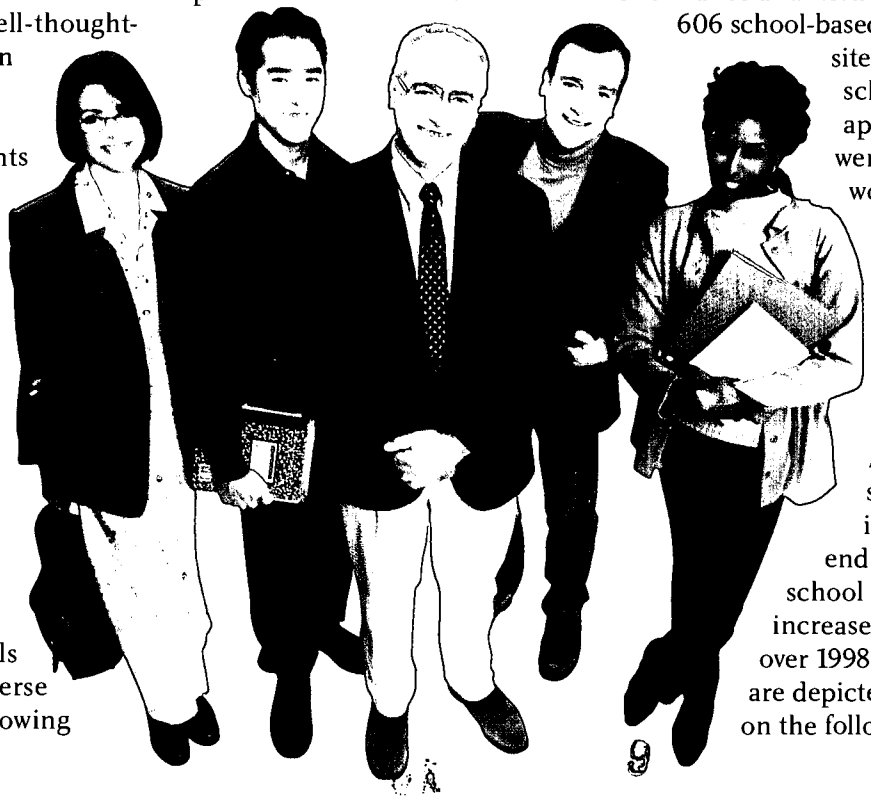
But revitalizing America's schools, like remodeling a house, is a complex process: Plans must be drawn up, experts consulted, materials located, experienced personnel recruited, and unexpected setbacks overcome without unduly disrupting the occupants. The Regional Educational Laboratories, partnering with schools, local and state education agencies, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), community and business groups, and governmental agencies, are uniquely positioned to assist with coordination of the many facets of this monumental task.

Just as reputable builders would not install a brand of wiring or plumbing that had not been thoroughly tested or start work in a piecemeal fashion without a well-thought-out plan, neither can schools hope to improve education outcomes for students with stop-and-start, untried fixes.

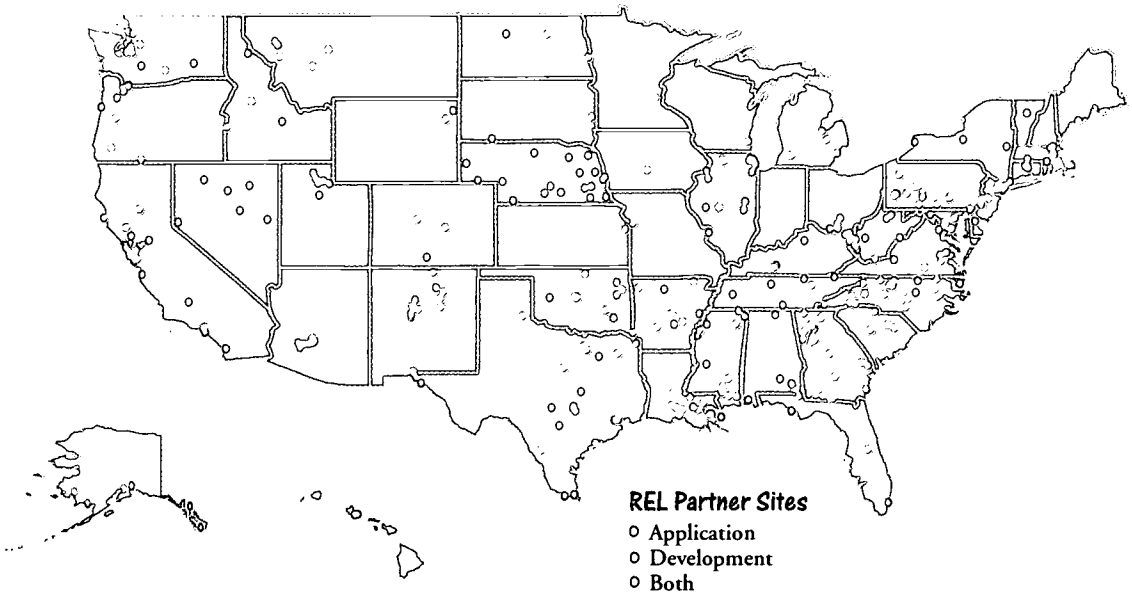
That's why Labs work with partner schools known as *development sites*. Here they identify roadblocks to learning, apply research-based models as potential solutions, and develop sound new approaches and tools that will work in diverse school settings. Following intensive testing, these models are further refined at *application sites*—urban, rural, and suburban schools eager to adapt the new and promising models to their own needs.

Some of the tools developed at these field sites might include a reading tutorial strategy and a video showing others the process in action, a professional development program and guidelines for its implementation, or a combination of traditional and portfolio assessment systems and a teacher-training package for its use. None of this is developed in a vacuum, but rather as integrated parts in a comprehensive plan, with Labs serving as guides and coaches to advise each step of the process.

For the past four years, the ongoing reform process under the Labs' current five-year contract has made meaningful progress as more schools move forward with their improvement initiatives. According to several key indicators for measuring the impact of Lab work presented in accordance with the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act, a total of 606 school-based development sites and 263 school-based application sites were involved in work with their Regional Labs. In addition, 100 Local Education Agency (LEA) and State Education Agency (SEA) sites were involved by the end of 1999. Both school and SEA sites increased in number over 1998. All of the sites are depicted on the map on the following page.



REL Development and Application Sites



	Development Sites			Application Sites		
	1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
Sites	494	615	606	236	328	263
Students	83,147	93,788	174,008	52,840	54,000	146,576
Teachers	5,899	6,950	10,960	2,025	2,219	7,572
Administrators	512	749	902	206	308	470

Development sites identify roadblocks to learning, apply research-based criteria to potential solutions, and develop sound new approaches and tools that will work in diverse school settings. Application sites are urban, rural, and suburban schools that are eager to adapt the new and promising models to their own needs.

Within these sites, teachers, students, school administrators, and parents partnered with Regional Educational Laboratory staff members to improve teaching and learning and prepare their school communities for the challenges of a new millennium.

On the following pages are stories that vividly illustrate some of the important advances for educators, students, and parents that have already taken place.

For more information

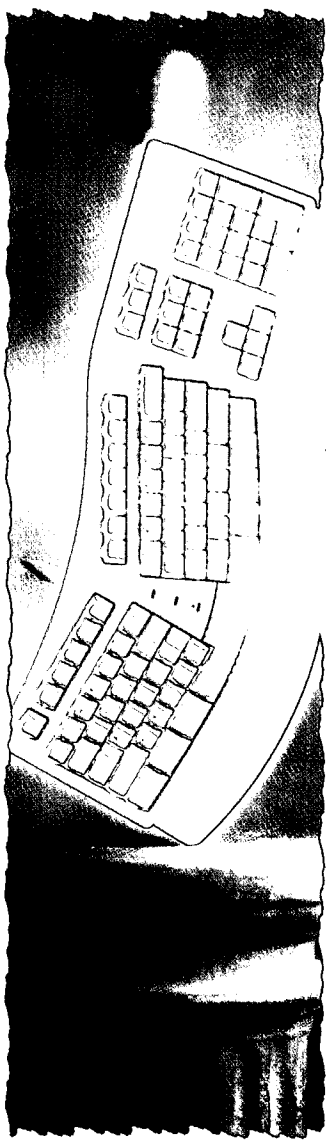
on how the Laboratories have worked in development and application sites, please **see** the following stories:

AEL (page 10), **LAB** (page 12), **McREL** (page 16), **PREL** (page 22), and **SERVE** (page 26)

or **call** the Laboratory in your region (inside front cover).

Providing the Tools to Support School Reform: Products, Services, and Partnerships

Schools today are deluged with a mountain of data: reports, analyses, fact sheets, proposals—many promising a quick fix or new-and-improved methods of dealing with academic and administrative concerns. If schools are to effectively educate and prepare children for their future responsibilities in the local, national, and global marketplace, they need help sorting through data and choosing the most appropriate, proven, timely, and enduring practices.



Regional Educational Laboratories provide that assistance by exploring research literature to seek out the most effective methods and materials, examining new products and testing those that measure up to stringent standards, and serving as information conduits for teachers, principals, administrators, and policymakers.

In this way, Labs tackle a myriad of subjects crucial to successful school operation and reform. They compile and initiate research studies on subjects such as learning English as a second language and at-risk factors in low-performing schools; at development sites, they field-test potential assessment, curriculum, and school governance tools and procedures; they cull reliable data on teaching and learning obstacles that inhibit learning; and they confront other vitally important issues to help educators do their jobs more effectively.

Some of the products and processes developed through this concerted effort include policy briefs on year-round schools or discipline-based arts education, reports detailing school-accountability options for legislators, and new teacher-mentoring approaches. These, along with other practical materials such as resource directories, newsletters, and teacher training manuals, are distributed to schools and districts throughout the nation.

In 1999, focused and timely products were disseminated to more than two million teachers, principals, school administrators, SEAs and LEAs, and state policymakers—a 116 percent increase over 1998.

Still, the Laboratories' work doesn't stop there. Lab education specialists channel information into classrooms by conducting workshops on topics such as distance learning technology, early literacy development, curriculum alignment with state standards, and many more. In 1999, these services reached 125,517 clients, a decline from the previous year as more educators accessed information through time-saving, Lab-developed electronic means.

Labs Provide Products, Services, and Partnerships

	1997	1998	1999
Products Received by Clients	419,927	988,055	2,132,530
Services Received by Clients	148,966	178,555	125,517
Website Hits*	11,834,588	19,305,052	30,379,269
Partnerships	145	171	173

* Increasing numbers of clients are being served through access to the REL website.

Along with websites at each of the ten Labs, two additional sites have made indispensable data available at the click of a mouse. These sites are CSRDWEB.net, a nationwide information forum established by the Laboratory Network in 1999, and the REL network website <www.relnetwork.org>. Educators have put these sites to use. Website counters recorded a total of 30,379,269 hits for the year, up from 19,305,052 in 1998.

All of these materials and services were well received. Indicator survey data revealed that more than 88 percent of client respondents commented on the high quality of Laboratory products and services. As one teacher put it, "The training was practical, useful, and fun, and everyone could really relate to the idea of working together, helping each other succeed."

In addition to producing beneficial tools and techniques, Labs offer still more. They concentrate on providing long-term improvements, building skills and capacity, helping clients work through all aspects of a challenge, and then, when the time is right, scaling up comprehensive reform innovations developed with local site partners until they benefit more and more school districts across the nation.

In 1999, Labs participated in 173 partnerships with schools, IHEs, job-alike educator groups, cross-institutional forums, and federally funded service providers such as Comprehensive Assistance Centers and Eisenhower Regional Mathematics and Science Consortia. A resounding 95 percent of clients who responded to surveys reported that these partnerships addressed significant concerns or expanded their capacity to work effectively.

By promoting networking opportunities and alliances, Labs bring diverse groups together to provide schools with a wide range of assistance and opportunities, thereby ensuring steady, forward progress toward a bright and successful future for all students.

For more information
on how the Laboratories have developed and disseminated products, services, and partnerships, please **see** the following stories:

LSS (page 14), **NCREL** (page 18), **NWREL** (page 20), **SEDL** (page 24), and **WestEd** (page 28)

or **call** the Laboratory in your region (inside front cover).

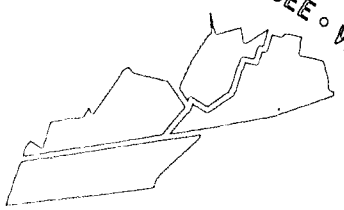
Professional Learning Community Model Helps Schools Counter Future Shock

On a cool October evening in Jackson, Tennessee, many of Alexander Elementary School's 521 families were having a difficult time finding a parking space. Incredibly, it wasn't a football game that drew the record-breaking crowd representing 94 percent of the student body, but parent-teacher conferences—only this night, the conferences were led by students.

In the classrooms, teachers and parents focused their attention on the children, who displayed their work and explained how they planned to improve in their studies. "When the children talked about their work," the principal observed, "the parents really listened. Sometimes they had no choice—one third-grade student refused to let her mother even hold the portfolio. 'If I give it to you, you'll look at it instead of listening to me,' she said."

The event's result: Most parents said it was the best parent conference they had ever attended.

The idea and the encouragement to try student-led conferences came from the school's involvement in the Quest network, a professional development model for educators that was developed at AEL, Inc., the Laboratory serving the Appalachian region, with the participation of 18 schools in four states. The Quest Network emphasizes the importance of educators' connecting with people and ideas found inside and outside their school as they jointly struggle with how to continually improve.



Quest provides educators with a way to stay focused on the business of school improvement, rather than getting side-tracked with various details that impede progress. One participating principal compared this with the opening of A. A. Milne's classic *Winnie the Pooh*: "Pooh is coming down the steps, being dragged by the heel by Christopher Robin. As his head hits each step, he is going bump, bump, bump and thinking to himself, 'I know there must be a better way to do this, if I can only stop bumping long enough to think of it.'"

"Quest, for us," the principal said, "is a time to stop bumping and do some thinking."

Quest has been designed to help educators effectively manage change. As the speed of change increases, so does the importance of slowing down to assess and reflect on those changes. The time and processes for accomplishing this—as well as the assumption that students and community members should be involved in decision making—are built into the structure of Quest.

"Data in a Day" is one Quest process used by teachers and administrators to facilitate this kind of interaction. This process requires the collection of data from multiple perspectives on a single day. The data are

analyzed and discussed by school staff to guide school reform efforts. When implemented at Woodbridge High School in Woodbridge, Virginia, it helped school leaders gain valuable information quickly about their new block schedule. Another Quest process helped students achieve better on an important writing test. The work began with several English teachers huddled around a table strewn with notepads and student work. They listened to one another as they asked probing questions about how their students were coming along in their efforts to write lengthy research papers—a new district requirement. It was the first of several "structured reflection sessions" designed to help teachers learn from one another as they focused on student work. The result? Ninety-eight percent of their students ended up receiving passing scores on their papers the following spring.

Atenville Elementary in Harts, West Virginia, which Quest staff members call "the little school that could," has made big strides. Before Quest processes were even introduced, Atenville staff had reached out to involve the parents of its 210 students. Some after-school activities for students were also being offered. Quest helped the school build on these efforts, focusing on strengthening the school's professional learning community and sharing leadership. Two years after joining the Quest network, the staff's perception of itself as a learning community had increased dramatically, rising from 49 to 73 points on an 85-point scale, according to questionnaire results. The staff applied for and received a federal grant to operate a full program of after-school activities, and in 1999, Atenville's principal was named National Distinguished Principal from West Virginia by the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

"Quest is unlike any other school improvement initiative," according to the principal of Natcher Elementary in Bowling Green, Kentucky. "There's... an urging to think more deeply, to ponder more often, and to reflect with the image of our children always in our line of sight." The school's focus on children is evident in the "Welcome to Natcher" videotape, narrated by students. Also evident on the tape is the staff's dedication to Quest's core values: ongoing questioning of school practices, high expectations for all members of the school community, individual responsibility for better performance, sharing and support among colleagues, and thoughtful reflection.

Quest uses the acronym SMART to refer to learners who are Successful, Motivated, Autonomous, Responsible, and Thoughtful. Quest aims to unleash these traits not only in students but in all members of the school community, including teachers, administrators, and parents.

Representatives of two schools in the Quest network (Alexander Elementary, Tennessee, and Woodbridge High, Virginia) participated in the School Change Collaborative of the Regional Educational Laboratory Network, which included researchers from most of the nation's ten Labs as well as practitioners from their respective regions.

Through this involvement, these representatives were able to view a new self-study process in action—one that had the potential for helping students excel.

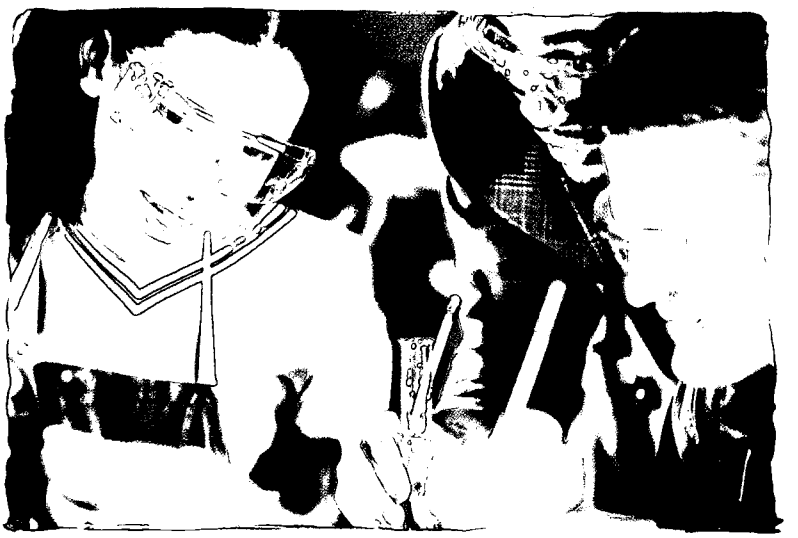
At Alexander Elementary, "Teachers not only used the structured reflection protocol themselves," according to an AEL R&D Specialist, "they also taught students to use it. So students had this very structured way to offer specific writing advice to one another." Within a year, scores on state writing tests rose 35 percent.

At Woodbridge High, the principal believes the teachers' use of the process helped 377 of 400 juniors pass a district-required writing assignment on the first review and helped 15 students successfully challenge their initial non-passing scores to win a second review.

AEL staff members are now working with the network of Quest schools to examine what they have learned and to put their discoveries in writing. Schools in the network hope that by sharing what they have learned, they can help other schools qualify for the Giraffe Award—a Quest invention that symbolizes a school's willingness to rise above the crowd to see the big picture, nibble at grassroots reality, move together as a team, and "stick its neck out" by taking necessary risks to help students achieve.

Visit <www.ael.org/rel/quest/index.htm> to learn more about Quest.

Breaking Structures, Mapping Reforms: How High Schools Create and Sustain Change



"You're our last chance," Branford High School's faculty informed their new principal, Ed Higgins.

In 1989, Higgins was the fifth principal in five years to take over the 1,000-student school in the economically diverse shoreline suburb of New Haven. The general perception of Branford was that it was a disaster, lacking discipline, good teaching, and coherence. Three-to-four fights per week erupted in the halls; drugs and alcohol were rampant. The physical plant was decaying and badly in need of repair, and less than half of Branford graduates were going on to four-year colleges.

Firmly believing that all students could learn, Higgins took time to get to know the school, students, faculty, and community. Whenever a crisis or an issue arose, he used the situation to move the school forward to a place where teachers no longer discussed level one or level two students. Branford's motto became "Improved Learning for Everyone."

New policies opened up honors courses to any student who wanted to try them, eliminated ability tracking, and adjusted instructional practices to a strong performance base that let students demonstrate what they learned and understood in ways that were meaningful to them.

Today, 70 percent of Branford's students elect honors courses. The school has seen a 45-percent increase in students applying for higher education, and 70 percent of graduates now continue their studies at four-year colleges. Graffiti and fighting have disappeared. Branford's teachers travel throughout Connecticut as "lighthouses of reform," informing others about the school's change process. School renovations are well underway, and the atmosphere in Branford's halls is one of community, trust, and responsibility. What does it take to create this kind of change?

What attitudes, skills, training, and configurations do principals, teachers, and students have to go through? To better understand how schools like Branford begin and maintain reforms, the Northeast and Islands Regional Laboratory at Brown University (LAB) teamed with RMC Research to study the changes in selected secondary schools that have broken traditional school structures and the effects of those changes. The study developed from previous LAB work identifying six high-poverty urban elementary schools' capacities for initiating and sustaining reform and built upon a series of LAB activities inviting participants to reflect on secondary school restructuring.

"We're interested in what sustained change looks like," explained project director Chris Dwyer, "not here today, gone tomorrow, but reform that's around ten years later. Secondary schools are often prisoners of their structure. What happens when you try to break that structure?"

Initially, LAB research focused on a trio of New England high schools—Yarmouth (Maine), Norwalk (Connecticut), and Branford (Connecticut)—and examined their experiences making changes in content, structures, and culture.

LAB staff met with teachers, principals, parents, and students and took them through a conversation about change, from the catalysts and transformations to where the initial changes lead. Researchers identified processes specific to each school and located common and different themes.

Like cartographers surveying the landscape and marking key points in the terrain, LAB staff mapped tangible, identifiable structures and abilities that occurred during the reform process. Each map was unique, and the results were taken back to the schools for comment, reflection, and revision. In Branford's map, the impetus for change centered around a faculty team's and principal's efforts to eliminate ability grouping and move the school toward a heterogeneous, inclusive learning process. School culture, structure, and practice changed simultaneously.

The LAB's early findings identified 13 key ingredients for change; several indicators emerged as critical factors in Branford's reform process.

Successful reforms at the secondary level are often designed, led, managed, and evaluated by teachers. At Branford, faculty discussion groups developed solutions to issues and problems; teachers were encouraged to pilot and report their reforms.

New structures reflected a belief in the professional nature of teachers—peer observation, professional portfolios, self-assessments. Opportunities for teachers to interact with faculty from other schools working on reform built confidence that what was happening in their classrooms was worth the effort.

The LAB also noted that community perceptions of the definition of a successful school set boundaries that could limit options for change. Effective reform has to focus the entire school community on the effort and goal, using language and ideas that are meaningful to constituents. Branford's community received "their currency of choice," data demonstrating improved student performance. Performance expectations were sent to all parents; the principal's and guidance newsletters explained school policies.

Individual guidance conferences were held with every parent and student to register for the next year's classes, and students were given increased responsibility for their schedules.

One of the biggest challenges for maintaining reform is "energy flow," how schools keep people motivated and focused when teachers, administrators, and parents are tired and have been working at multiple tasks and getting pulled in different directions. "Being asked to take a step back and reflect on where we've been and how or why we are where we are has helped identify issues we need to keep in mind as we move forward," observed Higgins.

> "The LAB's biggest asset for us was the strengthened practice of self-assessment, a constant process of looking hard at what we are doing."
>
> —Tom Murray,
> Social Studies Chair,
> Branford High School,
> Connecticut

LAB materials have provided a tool for Branford, Yarmouth, and Norwalk High Schools to communicate the reform process to others. After three more schools are studied, findings will be distributed in a user-friendly format to allow teachers and administrators to reflect on capacities and strategies in their own schools. "When one is leading, one is not always sure that he or she is doing the right thing," Higgins explained. "Having resources like the LAB providing supporting materials is very reassuring. As you try to take a school someplace, it gets awfully lonely out there. Research that says we're headed in the right direction is very helpful and clarifying."

LAB
Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory
a program of The Education Alliance at Brown University

The LSS Forum Series Helps Ensure a Quality Teaching Force in the 21st Century

Teachers and teaching are at the core of educational reform for meeting the educational mandates of a new century—if leaders don't change strategies for teachers, nothing will change for students. Some fear that there will be insufficient numbers of teachers in the next decade. The most serious problem may be, however, the preparedness and quality of the present and prospective teaching force. This emerging problem has triggered widespread dialogue on how teachers are being prepared and how they can be better prepared. With this in mind, the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) has initiated the LSS Teacher Quality Forums, a series of regional and national events designed to improve the nation's capacity to recruit, educate, and retain a high-quality teaching force. The Forums focus specifically on effective research-based knowledge and best practices.

Designed in collaboration with major professional organizations, deans of colleges of education, district and school-level leadership, national teachers unions, and other groups, LSS Teacher Quality Forums help answer the question, "How can research and what we know from practical applications be shaped and used in ways to increase teachers' success with their students?" In combination with the issuing of "white papers" by leading scholars and educational leaders on what contributes to teacher success, the LSS Forum Series provides a comprehensive formulation of next-step solutions around such issues.

Four major LSS Teacher Quality Forums took place during 1999, covering the following topics: teacher quality and supply, how teachers are being prepared and how they can be better prepared, what works in early childhood learning, and the impact of class size on teaching and learning.

The 1999 Annual LSS Executive Seminar entitled Professional Teacher Development and the Reform Agenda provided a venue for representatives from schools, state and local chief educational officials, policymakers including state legislators, and state and local school board members from the mid-Atlantic region to discuss possible ways of working together to link teacher supply and shared high standards. The Executive Seminar—co-sponsored by LSS, the Washington D.C.-based Council for Basic Education (CBE), and the Maryland State Department of Education—concluded with the formation of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Teachers Project (MARTP). MARTP has taken on the challenge of exploring a regional collaborative to examine issues concerning teacher quality and supply in the five-state Mid-Atlantic region. Based on discussions of regional and state-specific needs at a series of regional meetings, MARTP has begun working on two specific recommended programs: (1) the Meritorious New Teacher Pilot—a program that requires participating states to agree to grant full reciprocity to all teachers who perform highly on agreed-upon exams for specific certificates and (2) using student data as the basis for planning and formulating improvement policies—an action plan for using data collected in each regional state to help develop better teacher quality policies.

Co-sponsored with the Johnson Foundation, LSS held a national invitational conference on New Teachers for a New Century, initiating a national dialogue on how teachers are being prepared and how they can be better prepared. Participants

DELAWARE • MARYLAND • PENNSYLVANIA
NEW JERSEY • DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

included teachers, teacher educators, superintendents, and principals, as well as researchers and policymakers with differing views and somewhat opposing opinions. Nonetheless, discussion yielded fresh insights and thought-provoking dialogue among those seeking to improve how the children of the 21st century will be taught. Next-step recommendations generated by the participants centered around three areas: (1) Recruitment: Teachers of the Future, (2) Teacher Education: The Importance of Preparedness, and (3) Retention: Incentives to Retain Effective Teachers.

At the 1999 LSS national invitational conference on Early Childhood Learning: Programs for a New Age, a professor of Yale University, author of one of nine synthesis papers commissioned for the conference, closed the two days of discussion and plenary sessions by remarking on the spirit of collegiality and optimism generated by the teachers, parents, practitioners, and others present at the conference. "Determine what issue you believe in, and work on it," he said, "but remain consistently open to the evidence you find.... The people here are the children's best hope for improved lives."

Another topic central to the current discussion of educational reform is early childhood development and learning. An LSS national invitational conference on Early Childhood Learning: Programs for a New Age focused on what we know from research and practical knowledge about what works in early childhood programs during the first decade of life. Besides discussion on a wide variety of commissioned paper topics, participants also heard from "in-the-trenches" practitioners of successful early childhood programs being implemented across the country. Widespread follow-up activities are currently focusing on how to cause significant national progress in realizing the vision of a universal system of early childcare and preschool education for all in this country.

Another LSS Teacher Forum, co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, offered researchers, policymakers, and teachers information on How Small Classes Help Teachers Do Their Best. Mirroring recent federal and state policy mandates on class-size reduction, the conference featured details of reform strategies designed to improve quality of teaching and increase awareness of how learning takes place. Coupled with the heightened discussion of linking research and practice to implement class-size reduction, this conference was deemed most timely and strategic in improving teaching and learning in this nation's schools, particularly large urban schools.

The discussion and recommendations from the 1999 LSS conference How Small Classes Help Teachers Do Their Best are well captured in the lyrics developed by conference participants and sung by four teachers at the closing session in their own version of "When You Wish Upon a Star":

Class-size opportunity
Can become a reality
Teacher quality will make
This dream come true!

The LSS Series of Teacher Quality Forums is well positioned to target topics to meet the knowledge and expertise development needs of a wide range of groups. The Series provides the opportunity for an exchange of research-based, practical knowledge from diverse perspectives and viewpoints. Perhaps most importantly, the Series focuses on next-step solutions and forging regional and national collaborations on important advances in designing and implementing improved classroom practice, identifying research priorities, and meeting professional development needs. No small benefit of the series is providing a voice for the practitioner and an opportunity to contribute to rethinking, redefining, and reshaping what can be done based on what we know. In this way, scholarly expertise, practical experience, and divergent strategies are brought to bear in addressing major national and regional reform issues.

LSS

Laboratory for Student Success

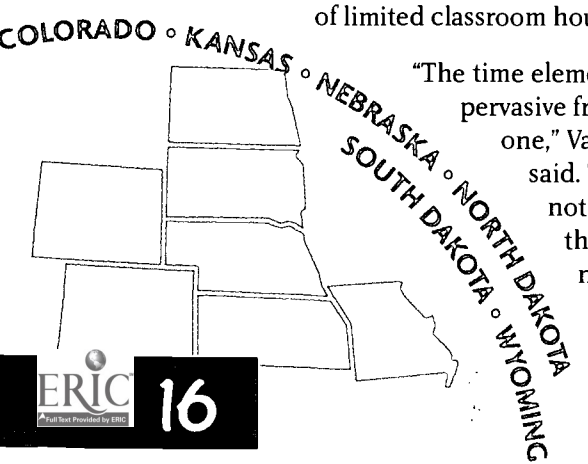
A North Dakota District Solves Its "Time-Versus-Standards" Dilemma

"There just aren't enough hours in a day to teach all these standards."

That's what researchers heard from one fourth-grade teacher after another in Minot, North Dakota, Public Schools during a collaborative research project between the district and Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL).

McREL researchers had designed an earlier study to compare the district's fourth-grade curriculum with the fourth-grade portion of North Dakota's statewide assessment, the Terra Nova. The data showed a close alignment between curriculum and test items. But a subsequent survey of teachers across all grades showed that some state content standards—although included in the fourth-grade curriculum—might not be taught in the classroom because of a lack of time. These findings confirm results from other research by McREL that suggest a nationwide concern about a lack of adequate time to teach content standards to students.

Don Vangsnes, a member of the McREL design team, said that a follow-up interview with teachers about instructional practice revealed the widespread use of one-on-one instruction and informal, observational assessment in the classroom in an effort to meet individual student needs. Of course, this individualized strategy further compounds the problems of limited classroom hours.



"The time element was pervasive from day one," Vangsnes said. Teachers not only lack the time necessary to adequately address every content standard for every student, but they also don't have enough time to look for additional instructional resources.

McREL researchers are part of a workgroup, including Minot teachers and administrators, that is meeting to revise the district's fourth-grade curriculum so essential content can be taught within the limited number of hours available in each school year. The group is examining each fourth-grade content standard to determine if it should be revised or combined with another standard or if it is sufficiently addressed at other grade levels. Members also are considering how the curriculum relates to instruction, to determine the most effective methods of delivering content knowledge to students. For instance, integrated assignments could teach content standards in both math and science simultaneously, while involving more real-world problems and examples that can help struggling students.

The goal is not to create a completely new fourth-grade curriculum but to revise the existing one so it is "practical and user-friendly." Since the initial match study showed good alignment between

curriculum and statewide assessments—and since Minot students have been performing well in statewide assessments—the workgroup is determined not to upset that balance as it prioritizes content standards.

"[The curriculum revision process] really makes us prioritize what we're all about," said Minot Curriculum Coordinator Steve Joyal, who is also a member of the workgroup. "We're asking, 'What is our main mission?' and 'Are we getting too fragmented?' The self-examination, with McREL's technical expertise, has been very helpful."

To help with the curriculum revision process, some workgroup members attended McREL's 1999 fall conference, paying special attention to a presentation on instructional strategies for four components of human thought: knowledge, the cognitive system, the metacognitive system, and the self system. Members also participated in pilot tests of McREL's Research Into Practice series of professional development workshops. In each case, the McREL training session or workshop helped workgroup members learn to look at curricula in new ways.

The workgroup is documenting its process of curriculum revision as a possible model to be used by other districts that seek to align their standards, curriculum, and classroom practices. The previous model used by the district was discipline-based, reviewing one subject area at a time. The new model will be interdisciplinary, focusing on grade-level curricula that will address all subject areas.

When the work with McREL is complete, Joyal said, the district might conduct similar match studies for other grade levels participating in statewide assessments. Since McREL researchers taught Minot teachers how to collect data in the initial study, local educators are now prepared to conduct similar studies to determine how well the curricula of other grade levels are matched to statewide assessments.

Vangsnes credited Minot educators with the success of the collaborative research and the progress of subsequent work. "They were ready to look at things in a different way," he said. "Central administrative staff members—including Superintendent Richard Larson—are innovative, forward-thinking, and always looking ahead." The collaborative work also benefited from a work environment within the district in which teachers are invited into research and change processes. "Group dynamics have been very good," Vangsnes added. "That's been a key to making progress."

McREL's Steps to Collaborative Research

McREL researchers are currently working with schools in their region in curriculum revision so essential content can be taught within the limited number of hours available in each school year. The following are the steps involved:

Step 1: McREL visits potential sites, discusses mutual interests, and negotiates formation of a partnership.

Step 2: A design team is created, which includes school and/or district personnel and McREL field service representatives. To build trust, McREL representatives conduct team-building sessions during which team members share information on how teams are developed and sustained, create ground rules, and fill facilitator, leader, and recorder roles. McREL researchers explain the steps of action research: problem formulation, data collection, data analysis, reporting of results, and action planning.

Step 3: The team identifies a problem area to study and designs and carries out research activities. Roles and responsibilities of various team members and partner organizations are defined.

Step 4: The design team monitors the implementation of reforms and assesses their impact. The team plans new research based on results obtained.

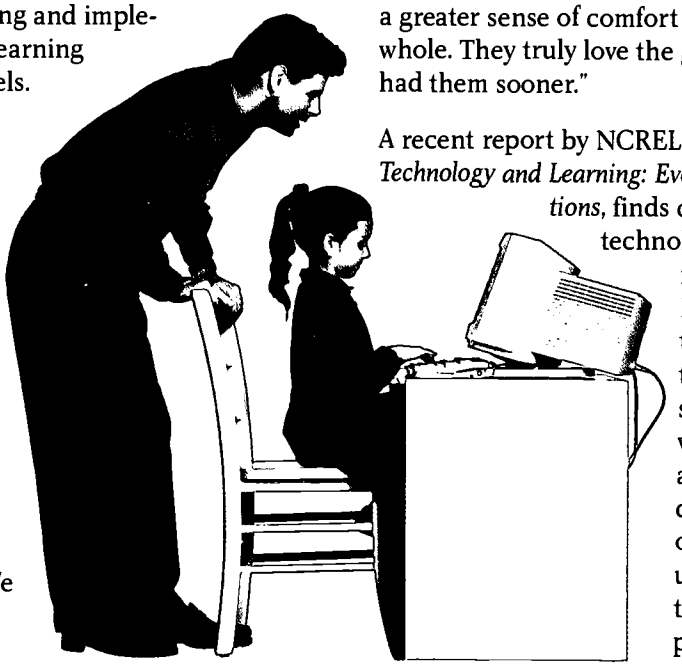
Minot teachers have expressed optimism about the partnership with McREL. Teachers hope the curriculum revision will help them achieve what has been their goal all along—to provide their students with the instruction necessary to master essential content across all subject areas.

McREL
Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

NCREL Drives Technology Planners Toward Success

When school and community technology planners met with their committees in 1999 to map out plans for the future of their schools, many had a new sense of direction thanks to a comprehensive set of educational technology resources from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). *Technology Connections for School Improvement Planners' Handbook, Technology Connections for School Improvement Teacher's Guide,* and *Computer-Based Technology and Learning: Evolving Uses and Expectations* form a complementary collection of materials designed to guide technology planning committees as they align their technology plans with schoolwide reform efforts.

The *Planners' Handbook* describes eight dimensions of technology planning and implementation and meets the learning needs of children at all levels. Developed by NCREL in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology, the publication has been embraced by school districts across the nation. Sharon Dogruel, Project Coordinator at the New Mexico State Department of Education, recalls that the *Planners' Handbook* came at a most opportune time. "We had just finished our technology self-assessment and were ready for the next step. The guide is very practical and acts as a tool to help strategize technology plans that support our educational goals."



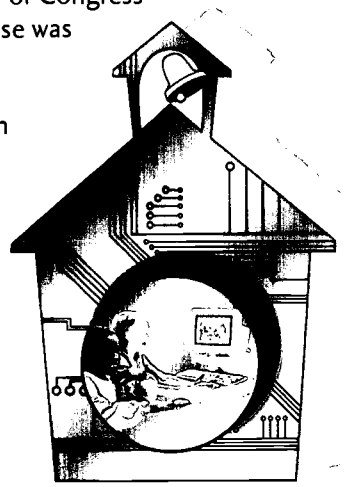
The *Planners' Handbook* had such broad appeal that a companion piece was created to take it one step further. The *Technology Connections for School Improvement Teacher's Guide* is a professional development tool for individual use within the context of a larger district planning effort. The guide was designed to assist classroom teachers who are beginning to integrate technology into their daily practices and are seeking to align their personal technology vision with that of their schools.

Susan Claudet, teacher at Gibson Elementary School in Houma, Louisiana, is looking forward to using the *Teacher's Guide* for training workshops this year. "Some of my colleagues are real techno-phobes," she said. "After just glancing at the guide, they feel a greater sense of comfort about technology as a whole. They truly love the guides. I only wish I'd had them sooner."

A recent report by NCREL, *Computer-Based Technology and Learning: Evolving Uses and Expectations,* finds concrete evidence that technology plays an important role in K-12 education. From improved attitudes to improved test scores, technology enhances student learning in a variety of ways. The authors of this report have documented three phases of educational technology use and provided cumulative findings around each: print automation, expansion of learning opportunities, and data-driven virtual learning.

These three publications round out a tangible set of resources for technology planners and teachers alike. "NCREL's resources fit together," said Dogruel. "*The Planners' Handbook*—along with the *Teachers' Guide* and the report on *Technology and Learning*—get people thinking about the multiple facets

When NCREL's *Technology Connections for School Improvement Teacher's Guide* was completed, one of the first copies was sent to Linda Roberts, Director of the Office of Educational Technology at the U.S. Department of Education. She was extremely pleased with the publication and made sure every Congressperson received a copy of the guide. From there, many members of Congress shared the guide with their states' departments of education. The response was overwhelming.



To date, more than 50,000 copies of the technology resources have been disseminated. Close to 2,000 copies of the *Teacher's Guides* and the Laboratory's *Technology Connections for School Improvement Planners' Handbook* were used in Technology Leadership for Secondary Administrators and Technology Assessment for Secondary Administrators training courses in Annandale, Virginia. Two hundred were used as part of technical assistance to 67 districts provided by the Bureau of Educational Technology in Tallahassee, Florida. In addition, NCREL disseminated a set of resources to technology coordinators at state Departments of Education and acquisitions representatives of curriculum libraries at colleges of education throughout the country.

involved in both long-term and short-term strategic technology planning. In order to develop a good plan, one should really refer to all three of the resources."

Demand for the publications has skyrocketed since their release in June of 1999. Since then, nearly 30,000 copies of *Computer-Based Technology and Learning*, 12,000 copies of the *Teacher's Guide*, and 10,000 copies of the *Planners' Handbook* have been disseminated. The *Planners' Handbook* was accessed through NCREL's website more than 1,000 times from June to December, while the *Teacher's Guide* was accessed more than 200 times.

NCREL is no stranger to emerging technology issues. Even before technology became its official, designated area of specialty, the Laboratory had established an informal reputation as the "Technology Lab." Beginning in the late 1980s, NCREL used technology as a dissemination vehicle to help penetrate its vast region, eventually leading to the study and delivery of technology as a tool for meaningful learning. What began as a simple response to one state's need for a study on planning for technology implementation resulted in the birth of *Plugging In: Choosing and Using Educational Technology*, a nationally recognized "required reading" for educators and policymakers. Today, NCREL reaches out to schools and communities on these issues far beyond its region, the Upper Midwest. One national effort NCREL is developing for the year 2000 is a series of three regional conferences focused on evaluating the effectiveness of technology in education.

One of the desired outcomes of the conferences is building regional capacity for in-depth fieldwork regarding the impact technology has on schooling and the evaluation needed to show the nature of those impacts to a range of stakeholders. NCREL hopes that planning the conferences in conjunction with the Expert Forum on Assessment and Evaluation of Technology, which is being hosted by the Office of Educational Technology at the U.S. Department of Education, will encourage noteworthy experts to take on leadership roles in the meetings.

Looking toward the future, NCREL hopes to continue the important work started in 1999 at the Secretary's Conference on Educational Technology: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Technology. Helping federal, state, and local stakeholders—along with school administrators and teachers—evaluate the effectiveness of technology in education is bringing the Laboratory another step closer to helping students achieve standards of educational excellence.

NCREL
North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
"Applying Research and Technology to Learning"

Process Letters

Class Participation

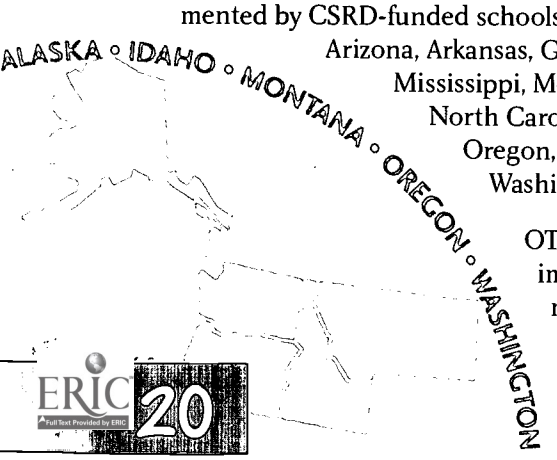
Revision, Paper 1

Draft, Paper 2

Schools Are Creating Their Future through OTE II

As in a painting of a landscape where seemingly parallel lines come together in the distance, 1999 marked the convergence of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's (NWREL) Onward to Excellence II (OTE II) model, the more recent state standards movement, and the very new Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program.

Comprehensive school reform is a powerful approach for schools across the nation to utilize effective research-based models and practices that will result in increased student achievement. OTE II is NWREL's proven research-based school reform model that has been implemented widely for the past 18 years. Described in two national catalogues of comprehensive reform models, OTE II is in the top ten of those showing substantial evidence of impact on student achievement. It is one of only nine reform models selected and funded within CSRD to increase capacity and is currently being implemented by CSRD-funded schools in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington.



OTE II fills an important niche because many schools seek support to design and implement their own program for improvement. A high priority for many schools is developing the capacity to work as a professional learning community and engaging in continual improvement for the benefit of all of their students. OTE II provides a steady path for schools and communities to do the hard work of reform, maintaining momentum on all fronts and doing what is necessary—in the short term and over the long run—to improve student learning.

Leadership teams in some 2,000 schools have been trained in OTE II, and many are still using key elements of the process. In the original OTE process, teachers and administrators worked together to assess their school's needs and chart a course for whole-school change. Training consisted of seven workshops over a two-year period to prepare a school leadership team to implement a ten-step process. The school leadership team—typically comprised of teachers, the principal, other staff, and parent representatives—learned the OTE process and then worked with the whole staff to collect student performance data, use the student data to set a schoolwide improvement goal, plan a prescription for improvement using proven practices from educational research, implement the prescription, monitor implementation, evaluate student progress, and renew the process in a cycle of continual improvement.

OTE II, the second-generation model, carries forward the fundamentals of the original process but incorporates recent research to build a process with greater potential for success in today's schools. OTE II retains proven characteristics of the first generation, including focusing firmly on quality and equity in student learning, sharing leadership as a norm for managing school change, using student performance data to set and monitor improvement goals, and

Student Learning: "It's Just Something We Do."

A school population with 60 percent of its students receiving free or reduced lunches often indicates a bleak academic picture, yet Glenfair Elementary School is bright, indeed. Glenfair, located in the Reynolds School District on the outskirts of Portland, Oregon, once served a homogeneous middle-class community, but availability of light rail and affordable housing attracted immigrants working mostly in low-wage jobs. Glenfair, with some 500 students, became increasingly diverse.

Using NWREL's Onward to Excellence II with student learning at the center, Glenfair has made remarkable gains:

- **Reading:** Forty-three percent of the third-graders met or exceeded standards in 1996. In 1999, 83 percent of third-graders met or exceeded standards. In the fifth grade, 50 percent of the students met or exceeded standards in 1996; while in 1999, 61 percent met or exceeded standards.
- **Math:** Twenty-nine percent of the third-graders met or exceeded standards in 1996. In 1999, 65 percent of the third-graders met or exceeded standards. In 1996, 36 percent of the fifth-graders met or exceeded standards; while in 1999, 54 percent met or exceeded standards.

OTE is institutionalized at Glenfair. "We don't really call it 'OTE' any more. It's just something we do," said the school's principal.

applying high-quality educational research to decisions about schoolwide and classroom practices.

OTE II strengthens important features of the first model. For example, schools are now encouraged to measure learning success in new ways, including aligning assessments to state standards. A wealth of research on effective school practices—goal-setting and curriculum alignment, for example—shows that with proper implementation, student achievement can improve. And while a body of educational research still needs to be conducted on whether standards are making a difference in student achievement, indications are that success may be a result of not just the standards, but the way the standards are implemented with proven research-based practices.

In OTE II, parents, community members, and students are given expanded roles to increase public engagement and achieve broad ownership for school change. And collaborative learning is modeled and encouraged to help create schools that are professional learning communities for both adults and children. Beyond strengthening the old model, OTE II adds new structures and processes to increase the chances of "change" penetrating into the classroom.

In helping schools—especially those that are low-performing—boost their capacity for improvement, NWREL is scaling up its own capacity to meet the demand for OTE II training and technical assistance. Through the support of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, NWREL is building a system of regional partner centers with other Regional Educational Laboratories and other service providers to prepare and deploy a cadre of OTE II trainers and technical assistants. Laboratory partner centers include AEL, WestEd, and SERVE. Other partner centers are Southeast Regional Service Center (Kansas) and Western Regional Professional Development Center (Ohio). NWREL and each of these entities will be working with six-to-ten additional schools to implement OTE II in 2000.

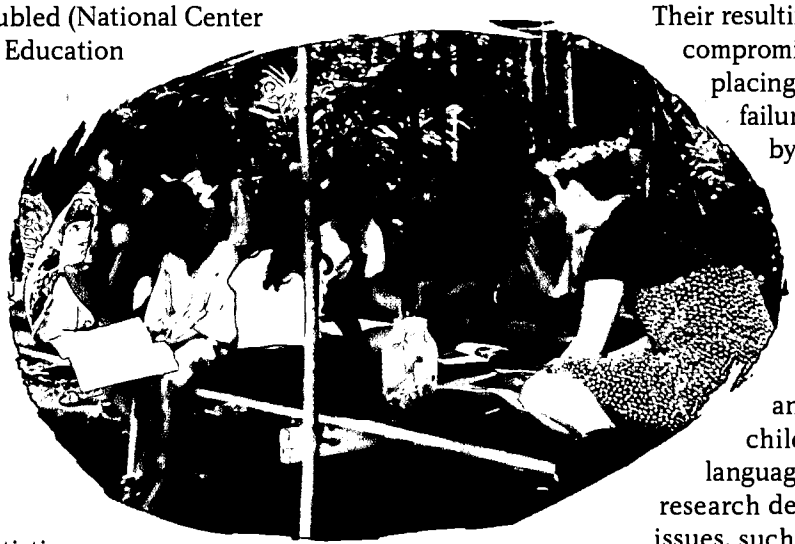
Along with help and guidance from skilled professionals, Internet technology is playing a pivotal role in providing the needed easy access to resources for schools engaged in comprehensive reform. E-mail, for example, gives affordable, ongoing, and quick-response help by linking key individuals at schools with an OTE II trainer who acts as an online coach and mentor. An OTE II website <www.nwrel.org/scpd/ote> spans time and distance to offer support when the support is needed.

Recent research on organizational change tells us that schools are complex systems and that helping schools become organizations that practice continual learning and improvement is hard, steady work that requires solid principles and a clear process for "getting there." Defining "there" as improved student performance has not changed over the years, but in OTE II, the process of getting "there" has been greatly strengthened.

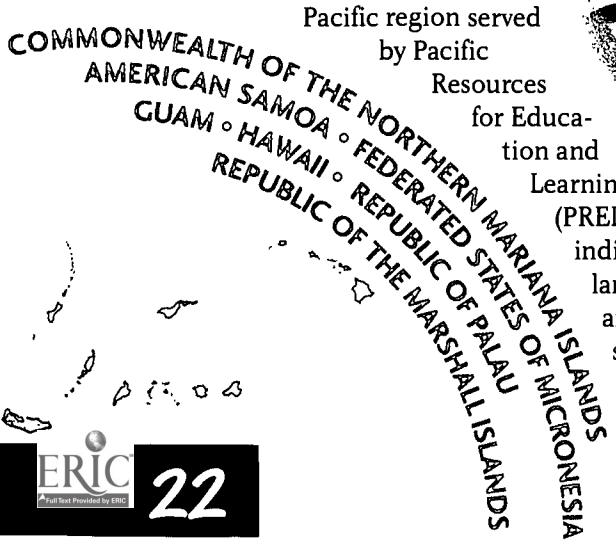
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Pacific Educators Inspire Student Literacy by Linking Writing and Art

Since 1985, the size of the general student population has increased only slightly, but the number of students learning English as a second language has doubled (National Center for Education Statistics, 1985, 1995). And more than half of those students are in elementary school, which means they are learning a new language at the same time that they are learning to read.



Becoming a skilled reader is a very complex task. Even native English language speakers can have problems becoming skilled readers and can spend a great deal of time trying to achieve reading proficiency, a doubly difficult task for students who come to school speaking a language other than English. In the multilingual Pacific region served by Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), 30 indigenous languages are spoken, and the use of English varies from place to place. An overwhelming number of Pacific children learn a language other than English as their first language. Their resulting low levels of English proficiency compromise their educational performance, placing large numbers at risk of educational failure. These challenges are compounded by a shortage of educational materials appropriate for the Pacific region and by a large number of teachers whose first language is also a language other than English.



PREL is devoted to helping educators and parents boost students' language and literacy skills, particularly for those children learning English as a second language. Recent studies completed by PREL's research department have addressed literacy issues, such as the discrepancy between the language used in many Pacific schools (English) and the language used by students at home (a Pacific language). One research study in progress is currently investigating the link between classroom language use, instructional practices, and students' reading achievement. Another study examines the link between computer-assisted instruction and reading achievement. Innovative products and educational services tailored to the Pacific region also address PREL's literacy priority. The Laboratory's bilingual *Reading Aloud to Children* audiotapes, available in ten Pacific languages, incorporate local legends to model ways that parents can read with their children, encouraging literacy skill development. The newly released *Pacific Area*

In a recent *Word to Image, Image to Word* classroom activity, twelve-year-old Leonard Pangelinan from Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands linked writing and art in the following story about a day of fishing with his family:

> *It is important in Saipan to fish for food. The people in my drawing are my mom fishing and my brother swimming. The person that is in yellow, green, peach, and red is my dad going to get another fishing rod, so he can fish. They are fishing for our lunch and dinner. My brother that is swimming is looking for the shell animal and also looking for crab to eat.*

"When I make a picture first, the words come more easily to me," Leonard said excitedly as he described his writing. "It's like the words just grow out of the picture. I can look at what I've drawn and describe things easier because I know where they are and what they look like."

Language Materials CD-ROM—a unique collection of more than 700 educational materials in 11 Pacific languages—promotes first-language literacy by bringing Pacific literature into the classroom.

An extremely effective tool for increasing student literacy is PREL's ongoing series of *Word to Image, Image to Word* training sessions. From the earliest of times, humans have told stories and drawn images, eventually leading to the development of an alphabet and words. Writing became universal and common. Humans could tell stories and convey their meanings through images, words, or both, and ultimately, images and words found themselves bound together in books. These concepts are the basis of the *Word to Image, Image to Word* series, designed to help educators teach techniques that integrate language skills with artistic expression. Through PREL workshops that train teachers in this approach to developing literacy, more than 700 educators in Kosrae, Pohnpei, Saipan, Guam, and Hawaii have learned this technique and have reaped the benefits of their newly acquired knowledge when they've used it with their students.

Writing from images can be an exciting way to improve both verbal and visual literacy. Recent research by the University of New Hampshire shows that adding a rich visual and sensory component to the writing process not only dramatically enriches children's story-making, but also enhances their finished pieces. Using *Word to Image, Image to Word,* students can either create a picture and then write a story, or they can compose a story and then draw a picture. In either case, both language literacy and visual literacy are enhanced. This technique values all learning styles and supports both verbal and visual skills. PREL staff members favor the image-to-word process, in which children are taught art techniques that develop their creative expression and enhance their pictures.

Research shows that lessons are more meaningful when they are built upon students' previous knowledge, so students draw from their own prior experiences and cultural knowledge to create rich art images. The beautiful images they draw inspire richer vocabulary as the children become excited about their creations. Once students have written accompanying stories for their artwork, the teacher incorporates their words and sentences into classroom reading and writing instruction. A rewarding product of this activity is a collection of beautifully made children's books that adults and children can use in the classroom, share with parents, and enjoy for a lifetime. An additional benefit is that children create learning materials that reflect their cultures, rather than relying on foreign-made textbooks.

PREL places a strong emphasis on the preservation of language and culture, coupled with the fostering of skills needed for success in a global economy. By conducting relevant language research and providing products and services that promote literacy techniques for diverse cultures and groups, PREL is making a significant impact upon increasing literacy in English and in Pacific Islanders' first languages, thereby changing their lives for the better.

PREL

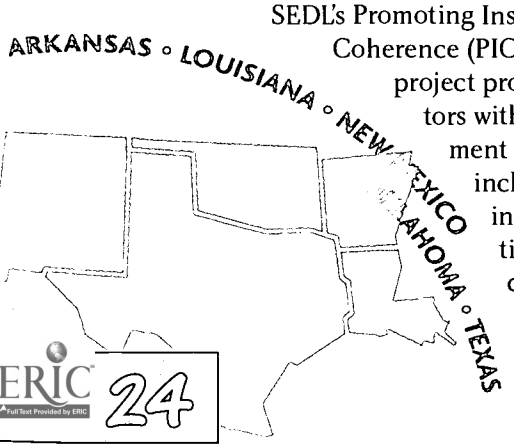
Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

Humphrey Elementary Shines in the Mississippi Delta

Three years ago in Humphrey, Arkansas (population 743), teachers were frustrated. For years, they had been given new programs designed to improve student achievement, but test scores remained stagnant. At the same time, there was an increased push for accountability. The teachers in this delta school—one of three in the district, all located on one campus—had few resources and were uncertain how to incorporate all of the state's mandates into their classrooms and improve student learning. "The teachers felt like they had a lot of little pieces, but they didn't know how to fit them together," explained one Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) program associate.

Teachers attended numerous training sessions designed to help them implement mandates and programs, but according to Humphrey third-grade teacher JoAnne Barron, "When you got inside your own little classroom and closed the door, you did things the way you wanted to do them. At one time, I just put the lesson plan out there and said, 'Here it is! I'm teaching this today. Get it?'" Barron admits that most of the time the only way students "got it" was by memorization.

Today, those attitudes have changed, thanks to the leadership of Humphrey Elementary School's principal, Iciphine Jones, and assistance from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). Because of Jones' desire to help her teachers make better instructional choices and improve student outcomes, Humphrey became involved with SEDL's Promoting Instructional Coherence (PIC) project. The project provides educators with an improvement process that includes using inquiry, reflection, and dialogue to examine their teaching and the beliefs and assumptions that underlie their practice and to identify dilemmas, tensions, and inconsistencies within their practice. The process also includes collecting and using data to analyze student learning and make instructional decisions that improve learning.



As teachers begin to reflect on their practice, they discover that curriculum, instruction, and assessment are linked. Changing any one aspect impacts the others. Teachers learn to rethink what they teach and the kinds of experiences students must have to meet established standards. In short, engaging in the PIC process helps teachers mesh curriculum, instruction, assessment, and various mandates and programs to ensure coherent instruction, all the while maintaining a focus on student learning.

SEDL's student-learning focus dovetails with Jones' philosophy. According to the 23-year veteran teacher and administrator, there is only one way to raise test scores: "You have to shift the focus of teaching from teacher-centered classrooms to learner-centered classrooms."

When the PIC project began at Humphrey in the spring of 1997, the faculty formed a study group that met every two-to-three weeks and was facilitated by a SEDL representative. During this time, teachers began to get comfortable with the process and their colleagues, while SEDL staff began to refine the process and develop resources, tools, and strategies to support the teachers in their effort to improve instruction.

During study group meetings, Humphrey's faculty identified assessment as a major issue. They recognized a lack of consistency in evaluation of student work. For example, a student might receive all As from her teacher one year in math, while the next year she would receive Cs. The grading differences confused students and parents, and teachers were often unsure whether their students' work was of an appropriate quality for their grade and age level or whether their students were actually learning. The teachers realized in order to implement state reforms and improve student outcomes, they would have to construct and apply consistent criteria for assessing student work across a student's K-8 experience.

As the teachers examined student work—first the work of students other than their own and then that of their students—they were able to identify what constituted quality work. The group then clarified their expectations of quality and determined levels or stages of development toward that quality work. The teachers were eventually able to agree on a method to provide consistent grading from grade level to grade level, eliminating any surprise in grading policy from teacher to teacher. They were also better able to communicate clear expectations to students and to use the district curriculum guide and standardized test data to make instructional decisions to meet student needs.

Teacher attitudes changed during their participation in PIC. Barron reports that when the project started, the teachers did not want to change. "But as we progressed," she says, "reading professional literature, looking at the research, and getting positive feedback, we saw that it would work.... [The project] made me want to be a better teacher."

Second-grade teacher Rita Persons agrees. Initially, there were so many concepts and issues of which to make sense, she was overwhelmed. But Persons says the study group sessions have enabled teachers to find ways to ensure every student "walks out of Humphrey Elementary with a quality education."

Jones is proud of her teachers' progress. "Teachers are taking a closer look at the curriculum and test scores," she reports. "They are looking closely at what they've been doing within their classrooms, identifying what their students need."

The teachers' changes in their practice have paid off. This year, the district's average score on the Standard Achievement Test (SAT 9) was at the 50th percentile, up from the 45th percentile last year, and well above the 38th percentile—the district average when Jones and her staff began working with SEDL. And with Arkansas' recent initiation of Smart Start, a standards-based education initiative, the teachers in tiny Humphrey are proving that they are ready for new challenges. Jones told her staff, "You're already doing this. You don't have to worry."

"We are glad we already had the pieces in place," she says.

To scale up Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's (SEDL) Promoting Instructional Coherence (PIC) process, SEDL staff members have trained a cadre of 23 facilitators to carry the process to a variety of educational settings and audiences beyond the five schools that participated in the project from 1997-1999. The facilitators are using a collection of tools developed by SEDL that includes activities, exercises to guide dialogue and reflection, and background readings. This year, 211 teachers are receiving support and training from the facilitators, along with 63 educators in other roles (administration, higher education, state departments, and reform programs).

Iciphine Jones, principal of Humphrey Elementary School, is one of these facilitators. She is working with a study group at a large Little Rock middle school as well as the group at her own school. Although the Little Rock study group operates much like the one at Humphrey, other facilitators are working with educators in various roles. For example, one facilitator is working with pre-service student teachers and their mentor teachers, another with a state agency that focuses on teacher professional development, and a third with content specialists in a large urban district. According to a SEDL program associate, the PIC team is assessing the process with different audiences and different environments.

SEDL

SOUTHWEST EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY

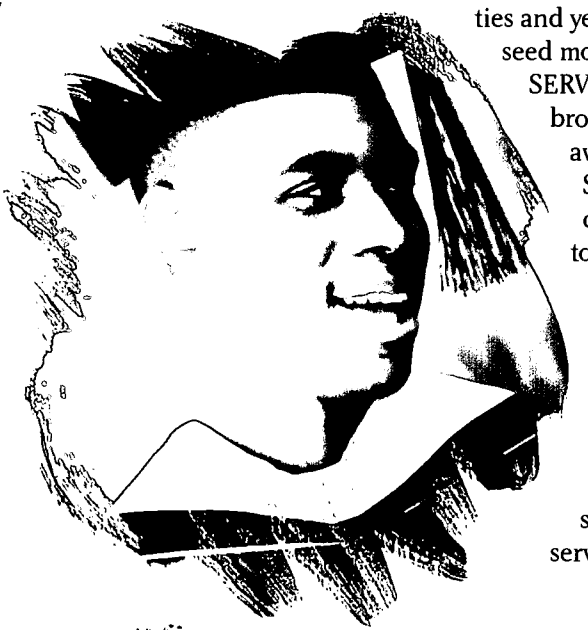
The Senior Project Prepares Students for Work in the Real World

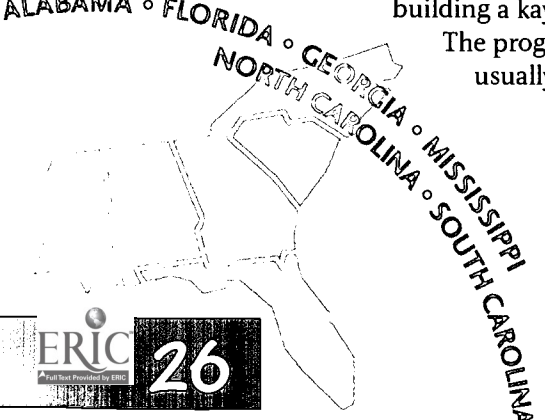
If teachers throughout the Southeast were asked about the impact that the Regional Educational Laboratory at SERVE's Senior Project has had on their high school students, a variety of wonderful stories would emerge. One North Carolina twelfth-grader volunteered 86 hours of her time for a United Way agency—far beyond the 15-hour Senior Project component minimum. Another student, whose graduation was in jeopardy, went on to build a beautifully handcrafted piece of furniture for his Senior Project presentation, moving his review board to tears as he described in painstaking detail how he had constructed it.

What, exactly, is Senior Project? It consists of twelfth-graders writing research papers on approved topics of their choice, developing projects and/or portfolios related to their research, and delivering presentations before a review board comprised of community members. The program is intended to provide seniors with a chance to learn about a topic they care about at a major transition point in their lives. It is designed to push them to demonstrate that they can research a topic, make sense of it for a public audience, and write about it—in other words, to "own" a topic that is meaningful to their lives.

Some high schools also require community service or internships related to the topic. Students' topics and their accompanying products are varied in scope. Examples include investigating Impressionistic art, developing an anti-drug video, writing a science fiction book, constructing a robotic arm, staging a fashion show, exploring nuclear physics, and building a kayak. The program is usually run through senior English class with students' Senior Project work as a part of the English grade and/or as a requirement for graduation. In some schools, Senior Project is a stand-alone class.

As part of SERVE's research in the areas of student assessment and school reform, staff members have supported secondary educators across the Southeast (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina) in developing and implementing Senior Project programs since 1994. Assistance has taken the form of training opportunities and yearly institutes, seed money to schools, a SERVE video and brochure to promote awareness, bringing Senior Project coordinators together on a regular basis to exchange ideas and provide program updates, and visiting school sites to view student work and serve on boards.





As with any new program or idea, a key to success is constant evaluation and reflection on how to improve the program. Through its networking, SERVE has provided this support. Currently, more than 40 high schools have volunteered to participate in SERVE's Senior Project. SERVE Senior Project sites represent a cross-section of the South; as a sampling, there are schools located in urban Charlotte, North Carolina; suburban Orlando, Florida; rural Guyton, Georgia; and the Mississippi Delta.

Before senior year begins, incoming twelfth-graders and their parents attend a Senior Project orientation. The orientation gives an overview of the intent of the program, its components, testimonials from graduates, and a timeline for completion. A student selects a topic that is both a personal area of interest and a learning stretch, writing a letter of intent stating the topic choice and how it will benefit him or her. A school committee then approves or rejects the topic. At every step of the way, students are provided with program guidelines and support. They usually complete several rewrites of eight-to-fifteen-page research papers that include primary and secondary sources. Although a typical assignment for "honors" students, this kind of writing has not been the norm for the average student. Students refine products and portfolios and must devote at least 15 hours to product development.

Why would a high school elect to implement Senior Project? The reasons are varied, but the ultimate goal is to raise standards within a school. A pair of teachers from South Medford High School in Oregon first developed the idea in their school in the 1980s as a cure for "Senioritis" and as a way to ensure that students could read, write, speak, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate when they graduated from high school. They also believed that it was critical that students gain added self-confidence and self-discipline.

Senior Project carries a variety of benefits. Participating students acquire new skills and more self-confidence. Many develop more focused career plans, and some are offered scholarships or jobs. Many unmotivated students become high achievers during this process. Community members at some sites rally around the Senior Project concept by supporting students and publicizing the program to a wider audience. In addition, Senior Project often becomes a self-evaluation activity for schools. By analyzing Senior Project student work, educators can upgrade their school programs so students will be more adequately prepared.

SERVE fills a number of roles in introducing the Senior Project concept to state, district, and school representatives. In North Carolina, for example, the State Board of Education has recommended that Senior Project become a high school graduation requirement for all seniors. SERVE staff members are asked regularly by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to provide support for Senior Project activities. At least a third of the school systems in North Carolina already have some type of Senior Project activity in at least one of their high schools.

At the district and school levels, SERVE staff members provide training and continual assistance to Senior Project high schools. Sherron Prewitt, Director of Secondary Education for Burke County Schools (North Carolina), recently remarked that SERVE was instrumental in supporting them in initial Senior Project training and implementation. And now, SERVE staff members are contributing to Burke's continued success in the district's two high schools.

Senior Project Evaluation Results

SERVE administered surveys to students, faculty, parents, and Senior Project coordinators at 16 established Senior Project sites in both spring 1998 and spring 1999. During both years, approximately 1,800 students, 180 parents, 170 faculty members, and 16 coordinators were surveyed. In 1999, 75 percent of students agreed that their writing, speaking, research, and time-management skills had improved as a result of Senior Project. Senior Project coordinators' and parents' degree of agreement was even higher—more than 80 percent. During the 1999-2000 school year, a comprehensive Senior Project evaluation is being conducted by SERVE, focusing on the program's impact on high schools, student achievement, and student plans after graduation.

Toolkit98 Equips Teachers with Critical "Assessment Literacy" Skills

Teachers are calling it "phenomenal" and "energizing." School administrators say it's "the philosophical base of our operations, the change agent for where we want to go—the sermon, the guide, the sage." Until recently, such lavish praise for a training resource that helps improve classroom assessment—even a tool this powerful—might seem unlikely. But the *Toolkit for Professional Developers* (*Toolkit98*), developed and tested collaboratively by all ten Regional Educational Laboratories and led by the assessment specialty Laboratory, WestEd, is proving to be a timely answer to a pressing, turn-of-the-century challenge.

Committed schools today are discovering that they can't raise student performance by relying on older habits of just giving tests and grades. Achieving higher academic standards depends on teachers' ability to tell what students really know and can do and where the learning gaps are so they can target instruction to fill those gaps. Yet study after study shows that most teachers lack this new "assessment literacy." They feel sorely unprepared to interpret state standards through their own instructional practice, to design their own classroom assessments, and to use a variety of performance data designed not just to *measure* but to *improve* student learning.

Toolkit98—a rich set of training activities and materials—is being used throughout the country to help teachers acquire these critical skills. The *Toolkit's* 1,200 power-packed pages include (1) a conceptual overview that looks at the core role of assessment in standards-based reform, integrating assessment and instruction and ensuring quality in grading and reporting, (2) teacher-friendly reading about these topics, (3) 37 training activities complete with overheads, handouts, and facilitator instructions, and (4) 48 sample assessments in all grade levels and in various subject areas, all of which represent a variety of design options for teachers.

Led by WestEd, staff from the nation's network of Regional Educational Laboratories are working together to help thousands of educators across the country get better at assessing—therefore, better at teaching—the skills and knowledge today's students must master. A core cross-Lab team provides intensive training sessions at national and regional institutes, as well as national and state-level conference workshops from Portland to San Antonio and from Sacramento to Chattanooga.

Designed for use by teachers, principals, professional developers, teacher educators, district staff, and consultants—everyone who trains teachers—the *Toolkit's* potency lies in the way it focuses directly on "how-to" classroom issues. Having state and national content standards in place does not automatically create school change. That happens in the classroom, in the day-to-day interactions between students and teachers. Through a series of hands-on *Toolkit* activities, educators practice sorting actual student work samples on a learning task, experience how to develop performance criteria, see how to "open up" traditional classroom assessments by exploring alternative measuring sticks for the same learning goal, grapple with some real-life grading dilemmas, and come up with solutions. Steve Nolte, Director of the Educational Development Center in Ft. Hayes, Kansas, explains, "We found that we simply did not have enough nuts-and-bolts knowledge, skills, and examples to really help people move forward." After an intensive two-day training session in Denver, he and his staff knew "how to help others actually write performance assessments."

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Follow-up surveys of users of the *Toolkit* show extensive and effective use across the nation. The 212 professional developers reporting in this year have conducted 648 trainings for 17,948 educators.

In addition to national team efforts, individual Labs conduct *Toolkit* training locally. In Iowa, for example, 50 school districts are incorporating the *Toolkit* into a school reform model aimed at standards-driven learning. And SERVE staff members use it as a "textbook" for responding to assessment needs throughout their southeastern region—training over 900 staff developers and 3,600 teachers. They also used *Toolkit* materials to help North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction develop a *Study Guide for Classroom Assessment* for teachers throughout the state. The *Guide*—which won the AERA 1999 award for outstanding publication in training materials—and the *Toolkit* were disseminated through statewide training to 2,600 principals in North Carolina.

Teachers and trainers alike praise the *Toolkit's* "comprehensiveness" and its "organization and ease of use," calling it "a wonderful gift."

"I am enormously impressed with the *Toolkit*," says Lorna M. Earl, Associate Professor, University of Toronto. "It's an outstanding piece of work, invaluable to educators. We are all indebted to WestEd's staff for their perseverance and commitment to high-quality assessment."

While learning how to develop a math scoring rubric "from back to front," *Toolkit* users also come away with a stronger, big-picture grasp of the central role authentic student assessment plays in teaching to high standards. Trainers report how teachers typically have "lightbulb" moments: "Now I get assessment," some have said, or "I never really understood assessment before this." Teachers consistently affirm how the training "brings perspective and clarity to the reasoning behind the new standards and assessments."

Staying in close touch with users, WestEd analyzed follow-up surveys across Laboratory regions. Results show that *Toolkit98* is doing exactly what it was intended to do—help educators at all levels use sounder assessments to promote standards-based learning. Reported benefits range from rethinking assessment models to using better rubrics to evaluate students' projects, papers, and course assignments. Some administrators attest that *Toolkit98* has been essential to their regional move toward standards-based curriculum and performance assessment. Teachers see fundamental change in the classroom. One commented, "The quality of my students' work is much improved because they are clear on criteria and expectations at the outset." A lead science teacher in Ohio described how she has improved in aligning student work with the intended learning outcome, "I ask myself, 'So what?' and if I don't have a good answer to that question, I revise the student work."

Toolkit98 began as a response to school calls for help in measuring student performance using clear, validated, and shared assessment guides. However, this pressing national need shows up differently in different regions, even in different schools. By working together—pooling special expertise and pilot-testing across regions—the Laboratories created a comprehensive national resource educators can apply to fit the need. Trainers are especially grateful for this "ready-to-use" tool's flexibility. It lets them customize training activities for particular local needs. Iowa professional developer Nancy Lockett uses the *Toolkit* as a "grocery store." When she needs a process or example, she simply "goes shopping."

Using a variety of dissemination strategies ensures access on a national scale. In addition to training institutes and workshops, newsletters, and flyers, WestEd developed a searchable website database, featuring topical information on promising assessment practices, resources, and research. Visit this section of WestEd's website <www.WestEd.org/acwt> for more information.

The *Toolkit's* first version focused on math and science. Because of increasing demand and a user needs assessment, WestEd revised and expanded this popular resource, adding language arts and social studies while planning other additions. Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) is taking the lead on a module for assessing English language learners, while Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) is developing one for using classroom data. Consequently, *Toolkit98* is catching on throughout the nation.

WestEd

Laboratories Lead the Way as Comprehensive School Reform Gains Momentum in 1999

From the beginning, the goal of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program was to create an environment in America's schools in which every child could receive a quality education. Research-based, whole-school reform—the guiding principle behind CSRD—is not an easy task under any circumstances, but by the end of the program's second year, 1,500 schools—many of them low-performing and many of them in rural or poverty-striken areas—had eagerly accepted the challenge.

Once the first steps—choosing a reform model and completing applications for funding—had been done, schools were faced with the responsibility of putting their reform plans to work. As they had from CSRD's inception, schools, districts, and state education agencies turned to the Regional Educational Laboratories to help them locate resources, stay informed, align instruction with standards, and make effective changes that would keep them in line with their long-term goals.

One undertaking in particular—building the capacity of regional educators and service providers to carry out reform efforts—was designated as a priority. Labs worked with model developers and other resource providers to supply educators with a variety of professional development and training strategies. SERVE, in collaboration with several of its region's departments of education and Regional Comprehensive Centers, offered leadership training workshops to 500 CSRD principals and administrators.

Among other endeavors, Labs developed programs specifically geared toward helping low-performing schools succeed in their reform efforts. AEL's External Facilitators' Academy provided the planning tools necessary for a cadre of more than 75 educators, state department of education staff, Title I managers, and regional service-center staff to prepare for such school improvement issues as evaluation, conflict resolution, teamwork, and involving parents and communities in the change process. In Utah, WestEd expanded its training program for a group of Distinguished Educators. And the LAB at Brown University has been an instrumental partner in the New York State Think Tank, a panel of school principals and district representatives who share their CSRD experiences.

One of the strengths of the Regional Educational Laboratory system is its ability to circulate newly developed methods, ideas, and tools throughout the Lab network. To support schools as they tackle the demanding implementation phase of CSRD, Labs originated a wide array of useful tools. SEDL established a national database of information about CSRD schools; McREL produced and distributed more than 4,500 copies of the CSRD evaluation guide, *Evaluating for Success*; and LSS's online, interactive handbook of reform models, *Achieving Student Success*, recorded almost 2,500 user sessions in the fourth quarter of 1999 alone. Other publications, videotapes, and audiotapes containing the latest CSRD information were regularly disseminated to schools in every state, and each Lab maintained its own website.

In addition, a nationwide, Lab-engineered website, CSRDWEB.net, was established, featuring in-depth profiles of CSRD schools as well as networking forums in which moderators from all ten Labs lead discussion groups on vital comprehensive reform issues. This high-tech database provides opportunities for all schools to learn from each other's experiences.

With comprehensive reform plans in place and underway, administrators needed to know if their schools' programs were working effectively, and they asked the Labs to help. After designing evaluation instruments and protocols, Labs such as NWREL conducted evaluation training sessions, examined the services received from model developers, and looked at the effects of reform on student achievement. Many Labs, including Pacific-based PREL, which served as external evaluator for the state of Hawaii, also helped develop state evaluation plans to ensure that viable monitoring and reporting mechanisms were in place.

Research played a key role in Lab activities during 1999. Both SEDL and NCREL initiated studies to find out how schools in their regions tackled the early implementation stages of comprehensive reform. SEDL's study covers all 278 CSRD schools in its region, and NCREL's report, *Launching the CSRDP in Six Midwest States*, reveals how districts and model providers, as well as schools, fit into the early-progress reform picture. Future studies will determine how rural schools are benefiting to ensure that they are not left behind or denied access to key resources.

During 1999, three Improving America's Schools conferences gave Lab education specialists the chance to see firsthand how their combined efforts were making a difference, as teachers and principals from all 50 states enthusiastically shared comprehensive reform success stories. This relatively new program has already improved learning for many students. For the Regional Educational Laboratories, work on CSRD activities has just begun. For students in CSRD schools, the best is yet to come.

Each Laboratory Provides National Leadership in a Specialty Area

AEL—Rural Education

AEL's rural education specialty promotes the integrity of rural, small schools in a global economy by focusing on the essential school-community relationship. Staff members work regionally to help rural schools and communities improve school readiness, school-to-work opportunities, and academic achievement. Nationally, staff members provide leadership, share expertise, establish partnerships, and inform debate. A special issue of *The Rural Educator* focusing on rural school improvement was recently published in cooperation with the National Rural Education Association. Forthcoming publications include a book on improving rural school facilities and an LNP monograph, *Sustaining Small High Schools: Rural Context—Four Case Studies and Resources.*

AEL contact: Dr. Robert D. Childers

LSS—Urban Education

LSS developed the Urban Education Enhancement Program to address the multifold problems faced by children and their families who live in inner-city communities. The program focuses on providing coherent and caring learning environments that link the school with the family and the community in efforts to achieve student success. The program consists of 1) working intensively with urban schools in support of their reform efforts to achieve student success, 2) conducting collaborative field-based development and applied research to build the capacity of local schools and school districts in implementing research-based improvement practices, and 3) convening national invitational conferences and discussion forums to address emerging issues and next steps in scaling up urban education reform.

LSS contact: Dr. JoAnn Manning

McREL—Curriculum, Learning, and Instruction

McREL's specialty area work focuses on infusing curriculum, learning, and instruction with high standards for all students. This work, which also addresses the needs of diverse populations and educational contexts, is broadly disseminated across the region and the nation. In 1999, an examination of effective instructional strategies based on an earlier meta-analysis of the literature on classroom practice was completed. A series of workshops designed to assist practitioners in using standards in their classrooms and in making the necessary adjustments in instruction and assessment was developed and is being pilot-tested. In a variety of formats, McREL provides educators with high-quality professional development designed for increased student achievement.

McREL contact: Dr. Louis F. Cicchinelli

NCREL—Educational Technology

NCREL has established itself as a leader in technology and engaged learning across the nation by examining critical issues from research, policy, and best practices pertaining to the application of technology to support school improvement. In 1999, NCREL widely distributed throughout the United States the *Technology Connections for School Improvement: Planners' Handbook and Teacher's Guide* in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education. NCREL also played a key role in the 1999 Secretary's Conference on Educational Technology: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Technology and wrote the conference summary paper identifying seven critical issues in evaluating technology, posted online at <www.ed.gov/Technology/TechConf/1999/>.

Another nationally recognized resource distributed during 1999 was the research review, *Computer-Based Technology and Learning: Evolving Uses and Expectations.*

NCREL contacts: Dr. Mary McNabb or Dr. Gilbert Valdez

The LAB—Language and Cultural Diversity

The LAB identifies strategies that educators and policymakers can use to address the needs of students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Working in partnership with practitioners and researchers, the LAB has developed a number of products and services that deliver cutting-edge research information on educating English language learners. Some of these include *Portraits of Success,* an electronic resource on successful bilingual programs, and numerous publications, including *What Policymakers and School Administrators Need to Know about Assessment Reform for English Language Learners; Standards, Equity, and Cultural Diversity; A Guide to Involving English Language Learners in School-to-Career Initiatives;* and *Implementing Standards with English Language Learners: Initial Findings from Four Middle Schools.* In April 2000, the LAB will host the Institute on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity, a three-day event that will use case studies to explore how policymakers, researchers, and practitioners can work together to advance the achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations.

LAB contact: Charlene Heintz

NWREL—School Change Processes

The national specialty on school change brings people and organizations together to improve results of school improvement efforts. Consolidation of knowledge is being accomplished through a series of working conferences on school reform conducted in partnership with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education. Collaborative development and research with several Regional Laboratories and schools is resulting in products and services to bring student views and work into school self-study processes. Direct support to schools as they engage in comprehensive school reform is provided as NWREL continues to scale up Onward to Excellence II, a research-based school improvement process, and enhances and updates the *Catalog of School Reform Models*.

NWREL contact: Dr. Bob Blum

PREL—Language and Cultural Diversity

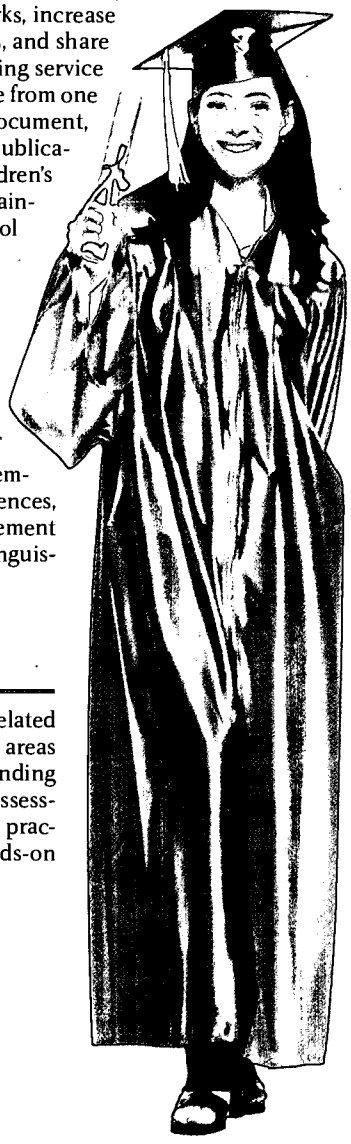
PREL uses research-based practices to improve instruction and student learning in culturally and linguistically diverse settings. A focus of its work is to help educators improve student literacy through maximizing both indigenous and English language development. Through its research, PREL identifies appropriate instructional practices and classroom language use patterns that produce higher levels of student literacy. This leads to the development of curriculum materials, training modules, and revised language policies.

PREL contact: Dr. L. David van Broekhuizen

SERVE—Early Childhood Education

SERVEing Young Children's (SYC) purpose is to build national research and referral networks, increase the knowledge base in early childhood education through research and demonstration sites, and share information and program successes through products, programs, and publications. Supporting service providers and policymakers in their efforts to facilitate successful transitions as children move from one setting to another has been a major focus of SYC activities. The Early Childhood LNP document, *Continuity in Early Childhood: A Framework for Home, School, and Community Linkages*, and other publications and training modules have been developed to assist programs in planning for children's transitions. In addition, SYC has conducted research, developed publications, and provided training and technical assistance in areas such as early brain research, quality childcare, and school readiness assessment.

SERVE contact: Dr. Catherine Scott-Little



SEDL—Language and Cultural Diversity

SEDL's specialty work develops, field-tests, and disseminates resources to schools and communities to help all students succeed. Work currently focuses on the following areas: examining adaptations to comprehensive school reform models to meet the needs of language-minority students, helping teachers understand cultural differences between themselves and their students and modifying their classroom practices to address these differences, identifying strategies to involve linguistically and culturally diverse parents in school improvement initiatives, and identifying and disseminating resources to assist educators who work with linguistically and culturally diverse students.

SEDL contact: Dr. Joan L. Buttram

WestEd—Assessment

The assessment specialty focuses on developing syntheses, products, and services on issues related to assessment and accountability for dissemination to practitioners and policymakers in the areas of school-to-work, teacher assessment, high-stakes assessment, and technical issues surrounding innovative assessments. Through WestEd leadership, the cross-Laboratory workgroup in assessment released two exemplary products: a website and database of best Laboratory-developed practices in assessment and accountability and a revised toolkit filled with high-quality, hands-on resources for professional developers in classroom assessment.

WestEd contact: Dr. Stanley Rabinowitz

REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORIES

ANNUAL REPORT

Linking the Worlds of Research, Policy, and Practice

This report highlights major 1999 accomplishments of the network of ten Regional Educational Laboratories. Supported by contracts with the U.S. Department of Education and administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), the Laboratory Program, in vital partnership with state and local educators, helps schools use research and proven practice to make a difference for children. This means

- Creating powerful new tools and knowledge—better strategies, innovative programs for improving school practice—that are developed and tested in real-world settings
- Providing direct assistance—in vision-building and planning, training and staff development, coaching, and ongoing technical support—to help teachers, administrators, school leadership teams, and policymakers risk setbacks and go the extra mile in school change
- Delivering research-based knowledge to those who need it, in forms they can use—from highly readable print publications to seminars and forums to electronic "dialogue"—to solve real problems
- Linking schools and the larger community, forging strategic alliances, helping educators become networked in ways that overcome isolation, pool talents and resources, and foster continuous learning

With more than 30 years of experience in working to improve the nation's schools, the Regional Educational Laboratories have established a track record of collaborative research and offer a well-developed system for addressing the nation's education needs. Collaborating on specific initiatives of national importance has resulted in durable, ongoing relationships in which resources and authority are shared in a coordinated effort. These collaborative initiatives require joint planning, implementation, and evaluation. The Labs have worked together to achieve common goals and practical solutions that are superior to the results each organization is capable of achieving on its own.

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